

THINK Weapons Safety

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To fight the negligent discharge problems the Army is currently experiencing, we must change the way Soldiers think about and handle weapons. Both leaders and individual Soldiers have a responsibility to set the example for others and make on-the-spot corrections. Drill home that your Soldiers must THINK weapons safety!

Treat every weapon as if it's loaded.

Handle every weapon with care.

Identify the target before you fire.

Never point the muzzle at anything you don't intend to shoot.

Keep the weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger until you intend to fire.

In many negligent discharges, it's clear the basic fundamentals of weapons handling were ignored. Based on information reported to the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center, the most prevalent mistakes that lead to negligent discharges are horseplay, improper clearing procedures, incorrect weapon status, failure to keep the weapon on safe and finger off the trigger when there's no intent to fire and lack of muzzle awareness. These mistakes are a result of indiscipline, overconfidence and complacency.

In fiscal 2006, six negligent discharge fatalities were reported in the Army. As of March 1, 2007, there already have been four fatalities—and we aren't even halfway through the year! Three of the four fatalities this fiscal year involved alcohol and privately owned weapons, and all occurred with what the Soldier believed was an unloaded weapon. Two Soldiers intentionally pointed a weapon at their own head and pulled the trigger. Here's a quick look:

- In October 2006, a Soldier was showing his privately owned weapon to a friend. He removed the magazine but didn't clear the weapon, which discharged a round into his head. The Soldier had been drinking alcohol.
- In January 2007, a Soldier had been drinking alcohol with a friend in the barracks. The friend warned the Soldier to stop playing with the weapon and not point it at himself. The Soldier told his friend not to worry because the weapon wasn't loaded. The Soldier then charged the weapon, pointed it at his head and squeezed the trigger, discharging the weapon.
- On the same day as the incident above, another Soldier who also was consuming alcohol was cleaning his POW in preparation for a hunting trip with a friend. He pulled back the slide, showed it to the friend and they pronounced the weapon "clear." The Soldier then released the slide, placed the weapon to the side of his head and pulled the trigger, discharging one round into his brain. He was a sergeant.
- In the most recent incident, two Soldiers were cleaning their M4 rifles in their living area when one of the weapons discharged, killing one of the Soldiers.

All these incidents were preventable. Leaders must enforce the standards for weapons safety so we can keep our Soldiers in the fight. How's your unit doing in this area and what tactics, techniques and procedures do you have in place to prevent negligent discharges? Let us know; we'd love to hear from you!